

The Exploits of Elaine

A Detective Novel and a Motion Picture Drama

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FIRST EPISODE

The Clutching Hand.

"There must be something new in order to catch criminals nowadays. The old methods are all right—as far as they go. But while we have been using them, criminals have kept pace with modern science."

Craig Kennedy laid down his newspaper and filled his pipe with my tobacco. In college we had roomed together, had shared everything, even poverty, and now that Craig was a professor of chemistry in charge of the laboratory at the university and I had a sort of roving commission on the staff of the Star, we had continued our arrangement.

"It has always seemed strange to me," he went on slowly, "that no one has ever endowed a professorship in criminal science in any of the large colleges."

I tossed aside my own paper and retrieved the tobacco.

"Why should there be a chair in criminal science?" I replied argumentatively, settling back in my chair. "I've done my turn at police headquarters reporting, and I can tell you, Craig, it's no place for a college professor. Crime is—just crime. And as for dealing with it the great detective is born and bred to it. College professors for the sociology of the thing—yes; for the detection of it, give me a Byrnes."

"On the contrary," persisted Kennedy, his clean-cut features betraying an earnestness which I knew indicated that he was leading up to something of importance, "there is a distinct place for science in the detection of crime. Today we have professors of everything—why not professors of crime science?"

Still, as I shook my head dubiously, he hastened to clinch his point. "Colleagues have got down to solving the hard facts of life, nowadays—pretty nearly all, except one. They still treat crime in the old way, study its statistics and pore over its causes and the theories of how it can be prevented and punished. But as for running down the criminal himself, scientifically, relentlessly—bah! we haven't made enough progress to mention since the hammer and tongs method of your sainted Byrnes."

"Doubtless you will write a brochure on this most interesting subject," I suggested, "and let it go at that."

"No, I am serious," he replied, determined for some reason or other to make a convert of me. "I mean exactly what I say. I am going to apply science to the detection of crime, the same sort of methods by which we trace out the presence of a mysterious chemical or track down a deadly germ. And before I have gone far, I am going to enlist Walter Jameson as an aid. I think I shall need you in my business."

"How do I come in?" I asked.

"Well, for one thing, you will get a 'coop,' a 'beat'—whatever you call it in that newspaper jargon of yours."

"Fortunately, Walter," he pursued, "the crime-busters have gone ahead in science faster than the criminals. It's to be my job to catch criminals. Yours, it seems to me, is to show people how they can never hope to beat the modern scientific detective."

"So far as you like," I exclaimed, convinced at last.

And so it was that we formed this strange new partnership in crime science that has existed ever since.

"Jameson, here's a story I wish you'd follow up," remarked the managing editor of the Star to me one evening after I had turned in an assignment of the late afternoon.

He handed me a clipping from the evening edition of the Star, and I quickly ran my eye over the headline:

"THE CLUTCHING HAND" WINS AGAIN.

NEW YORK MYSTERIOUS MASTER CRIMINAL PERFECTS ANOTHER COUP.

City Police Completely Baffled

"Here's this murder of Fletcher, the retired banker and trustee of the university," he explained. "Not a clue—except a warning letter signed with this mysterious clutching fist. Last week it was the robbery of the Haxworth jewels and the killing of old Haxworth. Again that curious sign of the hand. Then there was the dastardly attempt on Sherburne, the steel magnate. Not a trace of the assassin except this same clutching fist. So

it has gone, Jameson—the most alarming and inexplicable series of murders that has ever happened in this country. And nothing but this uncanny hand to trace them by."

The editor paused a moment, then exclaimed: "Why, this fellow seems to take a diabolical—I might almost say pathological—pleasure in crimes of violence, revenge, avarice and self-protection. Sometimes it seems as if he delights in the pure devilry of the thing. It is weird."

He leaned over and spoke in a low, tense tone. "Strangest of all, the tip has just come to us that Fletcher, Haxworth, Sherburne and all the rest of these wealthy men were insured in the Consolidated Mutual Life. Now, Jameson, I want you to find Taylor Dodge, the president, and interview him. Get what you can, at any cost."

I had naturally thought first of Kennedy, but there was no time now to call him up and, besides, I must see Dodge immediately.

Dodge, I discovered over the telephone, was not at home nor at any of the clubs to which he belonged. Late though it was I concluded that he was at his office. No amount of persuasion could get me past the door, and, though I found out later and shall tell soon what was going on there, I determined, about nine o'clock, that the best way to get at Dodge was to go to his house on Fifth avenue, if I had to camp on his front doorstep until morning. The harder I found the story to get the more I wanted it.

With some misgivings about being admitted, I rang the bell of the splendid, though not very modern, Dodge residence. An English butler, with a nose that must have been his fortune, opened the door and gravely informed me that Mr. Dodge was not at home, but was expected at any moment.

Once in, I was not going lightly to give up that advantage. I bethought myself of his daughter Elaine, one of the most popular debutantes of the season, and sent in my card to her, on a chance of interesting her and seeing her father, writing on the bottom of the card: "Would like to interview Mr. Dodge regarding Clutching Hand."

Summoning up what assurance I had, which is sometimes considerable, I followed the butler down the hall as he bore my card. As he opened the door of the drawing-room, I caught a vision of a slip of a girl in evening clothes.

Elaine Dodge was both the ingenue and the athlete—the thoroughly modern type of girl—equally at home with tennis and tango, table talk and tea.

Near her I recognized from his pictures Harry Bennett, the rising young corporation lawyer, a mighty good-looking fellow, with an affable, pleasing way about him, perhaps thirty-five years old or so, but already prominent and quite friendly with Dodge.

"Who is it, Jennings?" she asked.

"A reporter, Miss Dodge," answered the butler, glancing superciliously back at me. "And you know how your father dislikes to see anyone here at the house," he added deferentially to her.

"Miss Dodge," I pleaded, bowing as if I had known them all my life, "I've been trying to find your father all the evening. It's very important."

She looked up at me surprised and in doubt whether to laugh or stamp her pretty little foot in indignation at my stupendous nerve.

She laughed. "You are a very brave young man," she rippled with a roguish look at Bennett's discomfiture over the interruption of the tete-a-tete.

There was a note of seriousness in it, too, that made me ask quickly, "Why not?"

The smile flitted from her face, and in its place came a frank earnest expression, which I later learned to like and respect very much. "My father has declared he will eat the very next reporter who tries to interview him here," she answered.

I was about to prolong the waiting time by some jolly about such a stunning girl not having by any possibility such a cannibal of a parent, when the rattle of the changing gears of a car outside told of the approach of a limousine.

The big front door opened and Elaine flung herself in the arms of an elderly, stern-faced, gray-haired man. "Why, dad," she cried, "where have you been? I missed you so much at dinner. I'll be so glad when this terrible business gets cleared up. Tell me. What is on your mind? What is it that worries you now?"

I noticed then that Dodge seemed wrought up and a bit unnerved, for he sank rather heavily into a chair, brushed his face with his handkerchief and breathed heavily. Elaine hovered over him solicitously, repeating her question.

With a mighty effort he seemed to get himself together. He rose and turned to Bennett.

"Harry," he exclaimed, "I've got the Clutching Hand!"

Just then Dodge caught sight of me. For the moment I thought perhaps he was going to fulfill his threat.

"Who the devil—why didn't you tell me a reporter was here, Jennings?" he rapped out indignantly, pointing toward the door.

Argument, entreaty, were of no avail. There was nothing to do but go. At least, I reflected, I had the greater part of the story—all except the one big thing, however—the name of the criminal. But Dodge would know him tomorrow!

I hurried back to the Star to write my story in time to catch the last morning edition.

Meanwhile, if I may anticipate my story, I must tell of what we later learned had happened to Dodge so completely to upset him.

Ever since the Consolidated Mutual had been hit by the murders he had had many lines out in the hope of smothering the perpetrator. That night, as I found out the next day, he had at last heard of a clue. One of the company's detectives had brought in a red-headed, lame, partly paralyzed crook, who enjoyed the expressive moniker of "Limpy Red." Limpy Red was a gunman of some renown, evil-faced and, having nothing much to lose, desperate. Whoever the master criminal of the clutching hand might have been he had seen fit to employ Limpy, but had not taken the precaution of getting rid of him soon enough when he was through.

Therefore Limpy had a grievance, and now descended under pressure to the low level of snitching to Dodge in his office.

"No, governor," the trembling wretch had said as he handed over a grimy envelope. "I ain't never seen his face—but here is directions how to find his hangout."

As Limpy ambled out, he turned to Dodge, quivering at the enormity of his



"Don't Let On How You Found Out!"

unpardonable sin in gangland: "For God's sake, governor," he implored, "don't let on how you found out!"

And yet Limpy Red had scarcely left with his promise not to tell, when Dodge, happening to turn over some papers, came upon an envelope left on his own desk, bearing that mysterious clutching hand!

He tore it open, and read in amazement: "Destroy Limpy Red's instructions within the next hour."

Dodge gazed about in wonder. This was getting on his nerves. He determined to go home and rest.

Outside the house, as he left his car, pasted over the monogram on the door, he had found another note, with the same weird mark and the single word: "Remember!"

In spite of the pleadings of young Bennett, Dodge refused to take warning. In the safe in his beautifully fitted library he deposited Limpy's document in an envelope containing all the correspondence that had led up to the final step in the discovery.

It was late in the evening when I returned to our apartment and, not finding Kennedy there, knew that I would discover him at the laboratory.

"Craig," I cried as I burst in on him. "I've got a case for you—greater than any ever before."

Kennedy looked up calmly from the rack of scientific instruments that surrounded him—test tubes, beakers, carefully labeled bottles.

"Indeed?" he remarked, coolly going back to his work.

"Yes," I cried. "It is a scientific criminal who seems to leave no clues."

Kennedy looked up gravely. "Every criminal leaves a trace," he said quietly. "If it hasn't been found, then it must be because no one has ever looked for it in the right way."

Still gazing at me keenly, he added: "Yes, I already knew there was such a man at large. I have been called in on that Fletcher case—he was a trustee of the university, you know."

"All right," I exclaimed, a little nettled that he should have anticipated me even so much in the case. "But you haven't heard the latest."

"What is it?" he asked with provoking calmness.

"Taylor Dodge," I blurted out, "has the clue. Tomorrow he will track down the man!"

Kennedy fairly jumped as I repeated the news.

"How long has he known?" he demanded eagerly.

"Perhaps three or four hours," I hazarded.

Kennedy gazed at me fixedly.

"Then Taylor Dodge is dead!" he exclaimed, throwing off his acid-stained laboratory jacket, and hurrying into his street clothes.

"Impossible!" I ejaculated.

Kennedy paid no attention to the objection. "Come, Walter," he urged. "We must hurry before the trail gets cold."

There was something positively uncanny about Kennedy's assurance. I doubted—yet I feared.

It was well past the middle of the night when we pulled up in a night-hawk taxicab before the Dodge house, mounted the steps and rang the bell.

Jennings answered sleepily, but not so much so that he did not recognize me. He was about to bang the door shut when Kennedy interposed his foot.

"Where is Mr. Dodge?" asked Kennedy. "Is he all right?"

"Of course he is—in bed," replied the butler.

Just then we heard a faint cry, like nothing exactly human. Or was it our heightened imaginations, under the spell of the darkness?

"Listen!" cautioned Kennedy.

We did, standing there now in the hall. Kennedy was the only one of us who was cool. Jennings' face blanched, then he turned tremblingly and went down to the library door, whence the sounds had seemed to come.

He called, but there was no answer. He turned the knob and opened the door. The Dodge library was a large room. In the center stood a big, flat-topped desk of heavy mahogany. It was brilliantly lighted.

At one end of the desk was a telephone. Taylor Dodge was lying on the floor at that end of the desk—perfectly rigid—his face distorted—a ghastly figure. A pet dog ran over, sniffed frantically at his master's legs and suddenly began to howl dismally.

Dodge was dead!

"Help!" shouted Jennings.

Others of the servants came rushing in. There was, for the moment, the greatest excitement and confusion.

Suddenly a wild figure in flying garments flitted down the stairs and into the library, dropping beside the dead man, without seeming to notice us at all.

"Father!" shrieked a woman's voice, heart-broken. "Father! Oh—my God—he—he is dead!"

It was Elaine Dodge.

With a mighty effort, the heroic girl seemed to pull herself together.

"Jennings," she cried, "call Mr. Bennett—immediately!"

From the one-sided, excited conversation of the butler over the telephone, I gathered that Bennett had been in the process of disrobing in his own apartment uptown, and would be right down.

Together, Kennedy, Elaine and myself lifted Dodge to a sofa and Elaine's aunt, Josephine, with whom she lived, appeared on the scene, trying to quiet the sobbing girl.

Kennedy and I withdrew a little way, and he looked about curiously.

"What was it?" I whispered. "Was it natural, an accident, or—murder?"

The word seemed to stick in my throat. If it was a murder, what was the motive? Could it have been to get the evidence which Dodge had that would incriminate the master criminal?

Kennedy moved over quietly and examined the body of Dodge. When he rose his face had a peculiar look.

"Terrible!" he whispered to me. "Apparently he had been working at his accustomed place at the desk when the telephone rang. He rose and crossed over to it. See! That brought his feet on this register let into the floor. As he took the telephone receiver down a flash of light must have shot from it to his ear. It shows the characteristic electric burn."

"The motive?" I queried.

"Evidently his pockets had been gone through, though none of the valuables were missing. Things on his desk show that a hasty search has been made."

Just then the door opened and Bennett burst in.

As he stood over the body, gazing down at it, representing the emotions of a strong man, he turned to Elaine, and in a low voice exclaimed: "The Clutching Hand did this. I shall consecrate my life to bring this man to justice!"

He spoke tensely, and Elaine, looking up into his face, as if imploring his help in her hour of need, unable to speak, merely grasped his hand.

Kennedy, who, in the meantime, had stood apart from the rest of us, was examining the telephone carefully.

"A clever crook," I heard him mutter between his teeth. "He must have worn gloves. Not a finger print—at least here."

Perhaps I can do no better than to reconstruct the crime as Kennedy later placed these startling events together.

Long after I had left and even after Bennett left, Dodge continued working in his library, for he was known as a prodigious worker.

Had he taken the trouble, however,

to pause and peer out into the moonlight that flooded the back of his house, he might have seen the figures of two stealthy crooks crouching in the half shadows of one of the cellar windows, one crook, at least, masked.

The masked crook held in his hands carefully the ends of two wires attached to an electric feed, and, sending his pal to keep watch outside, he entered the cellar of the Dodge house through a window, whose pane they had carefully removed. As he came through the window he dragged the wires with him, and, after a moment's reconnoitering, attached them to the furnace pipe of the old-fashioned hot-air heater, where the pipe ran up through the floor to the library above. The other wire was quickly attached to the telephone where its wires entered.

Upstairs Dodge, evidently uneasy in his mind about the precious Limpy Red letter, took it from the safe along with most of the other correspondence and, pressing a hidden spring in the wall, opened a secret panel and placed most of the important documents in this hiding place.

Downstairs the masked master criminal had already attached a voltmeter to the wires he had installed, waiting.

Just then could be heard the tinkle of Dodge's telephone, and the old man rose to answer it. As he did so he placed his foot on the iron register, his hand taking the telephone and the receiver. At that instant came a powerful electric flash. Dodge sank on the floor, clutching the instrument, electrocuted.

A moment later the criminal slid silently into Dodge's room. Carefully putting on rubber gloves and avoiding



The Criminal Slid Silently into Dodge's Room.

touching the register, he wrenched the telephone from the grasp of the dead man, replacing it in its normal position. Only for a second did he pause to look at his victim as he destroyed the evidence of his work.

Minutes were precious. First Dodge's pockets, then his desk engaged his attention. There was left the safe.

As he approached the strong box, the master criminal took two vials from his pocket. Removing a bust of Webster that stood on the safe, he poured the contents of the vials in two mixed masses of powder, forming a heap on the safe, into which he inserted two magnesium wires.

He lighted them, sprang back, hiding his eyes from the light, and a blinding gush of flame, lasting perhaps ten seconds, poured out from the top of the safe.

It was not an explosion, but just a dazzling, intense flame that sizzled and crackled. It seemed impossible, but the glowing mass was literally sinking, sinking down into the cold steel. At last it burned through—as if the safe had been of tinder!

Without waiting a moment longer than necessary, the masked criminal advanced again and actually put his hands down through the top of the safe, pulling out a bunch of papers. Quickly he thrust them all, with just a glance, into his pocket.

Still working quickly, he took the bust of the great orator, which he had removed, and placed it under the light. Next, from his pocket he drew two curious stencils, as it were, which he had apparently carefully prepared. With his hands, still carefully gloved, he rubbed the stencils on his hair, as if to cover them with a film of natural oils. Then he deliberately pressed them over the statue in several places. It was a peculiar action, and he seemed to fairly gloat over it when it was done and the bust returned to its place, covering the hole.

As noiselessly as he had come, he made his exit after one last malignant look at Dodge. It was now but the work of a moment to remove the wires he had placed and climb out of the window, taking them and destroying the evidence down in the cellar.

A low whistle from the masked crook, now again in the shadow, brought his pal stealthily to his side.

"It's all right," he whispered hoarsely to the man. "Now you attend to Limpy Red."

The villainous looking pal nodded and, without another word, the two made their getaway, safely, in opposite directions.

When Limpy Red, still trembling, left the office of Dodge earlier in the evening, he had repaired as fast as his shambling feet would take him to his favorite dive up on Park Row.

Had the Bowers "sinks" not got into his eyes he might have noticed among the late revelers a man who spoke to no one, but took his place near by at the bar.

Limpy had long since reached the point of saturation and lurching forth from his new found cronies he sought other fields of excitement. Likewise did the newcomer, who bore a strange resemblance to the lookout who had been stationed outside at the Dodge house a scant half hour before.

What happened later was only a matter of seconds—and waiting until the hated snitch—for gangdom hates the informer worse than anything else dead or alive—had turned a sufficient dark and deserted corner.

A muffled thud, a stifled groan followed as a heavy section of lead pipe wrapped in a newspaper descended on the crass skull of Limpy.

It was the vengeance of the Clutching Hand—swift, sure, remorseless.

And yet it had not been a night of complete success for the master criminal, as anyone might have seen who could have followed his sinuous route to a place of greater safety. Unable to wait longer, he pulled the papers he had taken from the safe from his pocket. His chagrin at finding most of them to be blank found only one expression of foiled fury—that menacing clutching hand—the real one!

Kennedy had turned from his futile examination for marks on the telephone. There stood the safe, a moderate sized strong box, but of a modern type. He tried the door. It was locked. There was not a mark on it. The combination had not been tampered with. Nor had there been any attempt to "soak" the safe.

With a quick motion he felt in his pocket as if looking for gloves. Finding none, he glanced about and seized two pieces of paper from the desk,

With them, in order not to confuse any possible finger prints on the bust, he lifted it off.

I gave a gasp of surprise.

There, in the top of the safe, yawned a gaping hole, through which one could have thrust his arm!

"What is it?" we asked, crowding about him.

"Thermite," he replied laconically.

"Thermite?" I repeated.

"Yes—a compound of iron oxide and powdered aluminum, invented by a chemist at Essen, Germany. It gives a temperature of over five thousand degrees. It will eat its way through the strongest steel."

Jennings, his mouth wide open with wonder, advanced to take the bust from Kennedy.

"No—don't touch it," he waved him off, laying the bust on the desk. "I want no one to touch it—don't you see how careful I was to use the paper, that there might be no question about any clue this fellow may have left on the marble?"

As he spoke, Craig was dusting over the surface of the bust with some black powder.

"Look!" exclaimed Craig suddenly.

"Finger prints!" I cried excitedly.

"Yes," nodded Kennedy, studying them closely. "A clue—perhaps."

"What—these little marks—a clue?" asked a voice behind us.

I turned and saw Elaine looking over our shoulders, fascinated. It was evidently the first time she had realized that Kennedy was in the room.

"How can you tell anything by that?" she asked.

"Why, easily," he answered, picking up a glass paper weight which lay on the desk. "You see, I place my finger on this weight—so. You could see it even without the powder on this glass. Do you see those lines? There are various types of markings—four general types—and each person's markings are different, even if of the same general type—loop, whorl, arch or composite."

He continued working as he talked.

"Your thumb marks, for example, Miss Dodge, are different from mine. Mr. Jameson's are different from both of us. And this fellow's finger prints are still different. It is mathematically impossible to find two alike in every respect."

Kennedy was holding the paper weight near the bust as he talked.

I shall never forget the look of blank amazement on his face as he bent over closer.

"My God!" he exclaimed excitedly, "this fellow is a master criminal! He has made stencils or something of the sort on which, by some mechanical process, he has actually forged the hitherto infallible finger prints!"

I, too, bent over and studied the marks on the bust and those Kennedy had made on the paper weight to show Elaine.

THE FINGER PRINTS ON THE BUST WERE KENNEDY'S OWN.

(TO BE CONTINUED)